



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

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PRELIMINARY REPORT ON DUNE-LEVELLING IN ALBATROSS-PLANE PROBLEM IS OPTIMISTIC

The number of airplane-albatross collisions on the Midway Islands has been reduced 67 percent since the dunes adjacent to the runways have been levelled, according to preliminary information presented to an inter-agency meeting today at the Department of the Interior. It will be several months, however, before any firm conclusions can be drawn regarding the effectiveness of dune levelling on bird-plane collisions.

The dune-levelling project was started by the U. S. Navy last Thanksgiving Day at the suggestion of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service. The work was completed by the Sea-Bees in mid-March. The comparative figures were for the first three months of 1958 and 1960.

Modification of the terrain was suggested by Bureau biologists who believed that the dunes aided in the creation of currents attractive to the albatross for soaring flights. The levelling has been done on Sand Island only, since Eastern Island is no longer used as an aircraft landing area.

For several years the albatrosses, or gooney birds, which soar over the landing strips on Sand Island have been a distinct hazard to planes during landing and take-off. Biologists from the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife have cooperated with the Navy in an effort to eliminate the hazard without undue damage to the birds. Numerous techniques, such as the use of frightening devices, attempts to discourage nesting, and other things have been tried but without success. Both the Navy and the Fish and Wildlife Service are watching with interest the experiment which is now in progress.

A report of the results to date of the land-levelling project was given to a group of Naval officers, Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and representatives of conservation agencies invited to the Department of the Interior for that purpose.

The report was made by Chandler Robbins of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, who had spent approximately a month on Sand Island appraising the effects of the work. Robbins stated that on the most-used east-west runway the number of birds present were down 95 percent from the number soaring there two years ago. On a portion of the cross runway, where erosion threats do not permit as complete a levelling experiment the decrease was not so marked.

Robbins stressed that his report was strictly preliminary, and that while he and Naval personnel who have made observations on the Island were optimistic, additional time and study will be necessary before conclusions can be reached.

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